SERGEI PROKOFIEV:
LYRICISM, THE RETURN
AND
TEN PIECES FROM ROMEO AND JULIET, OP. 75

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Submitted to the faculty of the
Jacobs School of Music in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree,
Doctor of Music
Indiana University
May 2015

Accepted by the faculty of the
Indiana University Jacobs School of Music,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Music

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Introduction

Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* transcriptions are among his best-known pieces for piano, beloved by performers and audiences alike. Whether the ballet from which the pieces were taken represented a turning point in the composer's career has been discussed in much detail; in any case, *Ten Pieces*, op. 75, bear a musical as well as deeply symbolic and personal significance, which deserve special attention. This essay begins with establishing several watershed moments in the composer's biography: first, the circumstances of his death and funeral; second, the fateful events of 1948, with the period of decline that followed; third, his sojourn in the West. The paper goes on to consider the thorny context of Prokofiev's return, some of the plausible explanations for his decision to come back home, and the role of the *Romeo and Juliet* commission in the process. Prokofiev's lyricism emerges as a central feature: a key characteristic of his musical personality, it never gets as much attention as some of the brash qualities – a circumstance the composer frequently rued. This is followed by a brief treatment of the ballet's troubled history, a process which mired many of his masterpieces and which, in relation to the opera *War and Peace*, Malcolm Brown described as "Prokofiev's … attempt to reconcile inspiration with political mandate."[1] Finally, op. 75 comes to the fore, as a positive extremity of the altogether ironic difficulties, which its source ballet suffered on its way to the stage. The last significant work Prokofiev produced for himself as piano soloist,[2] it thoroughly represents his pianism: a staggering variety of textures, sharply defined characters, virtuoso control of touch, daring acrobatics and poignant lyricism.

[1] Malcolm Brown, "Prokofiev's War and Peace: A Chronicle," *The Musical Quarterly* 60, no. 3, 1977, 96.
[2] He did premiere his Sixth Piano sonata, but very actively sought to pass it and subsequent compositions on to other pianists, eagerly endorsing Sviatoslav Richter, Emil Gilels, and Anatoly Vedernikov.

Chapter 1

1.1 The Funeral Revisited

Much ink has been spilled over the near-mystical significance of March 5, 1953 – the day on which both Sergei Prokofiev and Joseph Stalin were pronounced dead.[3] For all the inferred symbolism of this coincidence, Prokofiev could never "boast" as much of Stalin's immediate involvement in his Soviet sojourn, as his colleagues Dmitry Shostakovich or the vastly inferior Vano Muradeli.[4] Hollywood screen writers would have culled better plots, had similar scenarios involved Boris Pasternak,[5] Maria Yudina,[6] or Pyotr Konchalovsky:[7] the poet, pianist, and painter had had much more direct and layered relationships with The Brilliant Genius of Humanity, and the irony would have been far greater. Of more significance were the pragmatic outcomes. The "state-sponsored, round-the-clock hysteria"[8] surrounding the passing of Stalin overshadowed everything and everyone. Prokofiev's funeral would go virtually unattended–no more than forty people were there–and unacknowledged: the first notice appeared on March 9, of all places, in *The New York Times*. In the March 15 article by the chief music critic Olin Downes the date of the composer's passing was incorrectly given as March 4.[9] The first Soviet obituaries appeared on March 18, having been delayed, by, among other things, a prolonged discussion of whether the composer should be referred to as simply "great" or, more distinctly, "outstanding."[10] The great irony was that this staggering neglect was categorically *not* due to the fact that the composer had suffered a humiliating fall from his place of honor following Andrei Zhdanov's Anti-Formalist

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[3] While there is reliable information regarding the cause and the exact hour of Prokofiev's death, neither has been positively verified for Stalin.
[4] Composer of the rather inane but hapless opera *The Great Friendship*, which precipitated the anti-formalist campaign of 1948.
[5] See Benedikt Sarnov, *Stalin i Pisateli* [*Stalin and the Writers*], 4 vols., Dialogi o kul't ure [Dialogues on Culture], (Moscow: Eksmo, 2008).
[6] Andrei Scherbakov, "Velikaya Pianistka Molilas' za Stalina," [The Great Pianist Who Prayed for Stalin], accessed January 10, 2015, http://www.peoples.ru/art/music/classical/yudina/history.html.
[7] Irina Vakar, "Petr Konchalovsky: A View from the New Century," *Nashe Naslediye* 2011 [*Our Heritage* 2011], accessed January 10, 2015, http://www.nasledie-rus.ru/podshivka/9904.php.
[8] Simon Morrison, *The People's Artist: Prokofiev's Soviet Years* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 388
[9] Ibid.
[10] Harlow Robinson, *Sergei Prokofiev: A Biography*, reissue (Boston: Northeastern Univ. Press, 2002), 1.

campaign of 1948; it could not even be seen as yet another deliberate act on the part of the ubiquitous oppression to which the Soviet citizenry was subjected by the ruling apparatus. This was pure *senselessness*: nobody knew what to do, now that Stalin was gone.

Prokofiev's biographers describe the events immediately following his death with astounding variety. Izrail' Nestyev's official Soviet report[11] can be viewed with skepticism on ideological grounds, as could Victor Seroff's account,[12] tendentiously anti-Soviet in intent and deplorably devoid of documentary evidence (understandably so–The Iron Curtain did earn its reputation). Harlow Robinson's description is more serious, but also marred by mistakes: the so-called *grazhdanskaya panihida* (civil memorial service) was held at the Composers' House (*not* the Composers' Union), on March 7 (not 6) and, among other things, Sviatoslav Richter, who was in Sukhumi at the time, could not have "placed a pine branch on the coffin."[13] Simon Morrison's meticulously researched and nearly impeccably executed opus on Prokofiev's Soviet years makes the unfortunate error of referring to the renowned Moscow Conservatory professor Samuil Feinberg, an erstwhile brilliant prodigy, a seasoned veteran of the stage and the international competition jury, and a composer and transcriber of significant repute, as "Oistrakh's accompanist."[14] Igor Vishnevetsky's more detailed and fanciful version fails to mention the officials present:[15] Tikhon Khrennikov (of course, Prokofiev's chief denouncer among colleagues) to represent the Union of Composers, and the odious cultural functionaries Kuharsky and Kholodilin. Most accounts do converge on that Feinberg played Bach, David Oistrakh played two movements from Prokofiev's Violin Sonata no. 1 (with Feinberg), Shostakovich spoke, and both Rostropovich and Richter were conspicuous in their absence. Pianist Luba Edlina-Dubinsky, professor at Indiana University and the widow of violinist Rostislav Dubinsky, founder and

[11] Izrail' Nestyev, *Prokof'ev* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1957), 438.
[12] Victor Seroff, *Sergei Prokofiev, A Soviet Tragedy: The Case of Sergei Prokofiev, His Life and Work, His Critics, and His Executioners* (New York: Funk and Wagnales, 1968), 317.
[13] Robinson, *Sergei Prokofiev*, 3.
[14] Morrison, *People's Artist*, 388.
[15] Igor Vishnevetsky, *Sergei Prokofiev*, The Lives of Remarkable People (Moscow: Molodaya Gvardiya, 2009), 669.

artistic director of the pre-eminent Borodin Quartet, provided details for the events described in her late husband's book:[16]

> The quartet did not have its official name yet. They were just starting to break through and were often called on to perform for state functions, such as funerals. Of course, they had to play at Stalin's funeral; they ended up spending three full days and nights there, filling in the space between all of the various performers. They were instructed to wear tailcoats, with black ribbons to mark the occasion. In order to get through the barricaded streets and the huge crowds, they were escorted by a company of policemen. However, before the Hall of Columns, where Stalin lay in state, they were taken to the Composers' House, to play for Prokofiev's memorial. They were not sure what to play: neither of the two Prokofiev quartets was in favor with the authorities, and, even if they had been, they were not appropriate for the occasion. Kholodilin did not have any scruples and unceremoniously commanded them to play Tchaikovsky–never mind that Prokofiev was always rather critical of Tchaikovsky.[17]

Malcolm Brown, the dean of American scholarship on Russian music, endorses her account.[18]

1.2 The Decline

The composer's death at the age of sixty-one was undoubtedly premature, but not altogether unexpected. He was battling a variety of ailments for quite some time, especially following the fall and brain concussion that he suffered several days after the brilliant premiere of his *Fifth Symphony* in January of 1945. Nose-bleeds and debilitating head-aches, constant struggles with doctors, who preached prudence and put stringent restrictions on his activities, compulsory residence at the dacha in Nikolina Gora in order to avoid the stresses of life in Moscow: all of this put a strain on Prokofiev's indefatigably sunny disposition and normally unshakeable belief in himself, and greatly affected his work during his final years. Relentless stress was an important cause of the high blood pressure which in turn precipitated in these health problems. Surely, the composer's formidable work ethic, the troubles in his personal life (the estrangement from his wife Lina had begun as early as 1938), and the privations of wartime and

[16] See "Stalin's Death" in Rostislav Dubinsky, *Stormy Applause: Making Music in a Worker's State* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 34-44.
[17] From personal interviews.
[18] From personal interview.

reconstruction period:[19] all of these factors doubtlessly contributed to the stress. The proverbial "elephant in the room," however, was the singularly disastrous chain of events that befell him in 1948.

On February 10, 1948, Prokofiev received one of the highest honors for a Soviet musician: he was awarded the title of People's Artist of the Russian Federation, second in importance only to People's Artist of the USSR.[20] Long-awaited approval and, with it, a reward for the enormous risk he had taken in moving back to his native country seemed to have finally begun to materialize. However, Stalin's governance was almost biblical in its omnipotent ability to give and take away. Nearly simultaneous with the celebration of Prokofiev's latest honor, there began a systematic and ruthless campaign which targeted the elite of Soviet composition and in which specific attacks, as scathing as they were voluminous, were directed at Prokofiev and his works.

Andrei Zhdanov (1896-1948) had held a number of posts, both in the Communist Party and the government. That Stalin directed him to take charge of cultural ideology was certainly not due to any special expertise he had had in the field: far from it, it was characteristic of Zhdanov, an infantry officer by training, to give rousing speeches as astounding in scope as they were in bad grammar, absurdly illogical construction of arguments, and complete lack of knowledge of the subject at hand. It must be noted, however, that this style of delivery and content was very much the standard, and Zhdanov did not especially stand out among the Party bosses. The Zhdanov Doctrine (*Zhdanovschina*) was first applied to literature, with the 1946 attacks that focused on the poetry of Anna Akhmatova and the prose of Mikhail Zoschenko, then to

[19] Hitler broke the infamous non-aggression pact in June of 1941, and the USSR was under the heaviest duress imaginable for over four years during the war and at least three years after.

[20] The order for the award had been issued during the preceding fall; this was the culmination of the general elevation of the composer's status, as evidenced by, among other things, a string of Stalin Prizes, which, having been denied Prokofiev for a number of years, finally began with an Award of the Second Rank for the *Seventh Piano Sonata* (given in 1943) and, finally, two Awards of the First Rank, one for the *Fifth Symphony* and the *Eighth Piano Sonata* jointly, and the other for the music to Part One of the film "Ivan the Terrible," a collaboration with the cinematic revolutionary Sergei Eisenstein.

philosophy, and, finally, in 1948, to music. Zhdanov's iconic motto "The only conflict that is possible in Soviet culture is the conflict between good and best"[21] manifested itself in music with the Anti-Formalist canon, ironically amorphous in its tenets and spurious in fundamental axioms. No definition of the term can be found in any of the plethora of speeches given during the campaign. What can be gleaned from all the passing references going back to the hey-day of the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians in the 1920s down to the official decrees of the 1940s, Formalism became an umbrella term for anything the ruling apparatus found undesirable and tended to focus on the personalities to be denounced rather than clearly identifiable traits. The aesthetic principles were as dynamic as the political agenda required. Hence, Formalism was more likely to be defined in terms it was *NOT*, rather than what it *was*: the approved cultural credo was Socialist Realism, and anything that failed to adhere to it could be denounced as Formalist. By 1973, the Great Soviet Encyclopedia defined it as, "the preference given to form over content in any of a variety of spheres of human activity."[22] However, even this ultimately fails as a possibly convincing definition of what it was that constituted the infractions committed by Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Khachaturyan, and others. Socialist Realism, as defined by Zhdanov at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, aimed "to depict reality in its revolutionary development."[23] Thus, the dynamism of reality was part of the basic definition, and, as the image of the revolution was constantly re-shaped by those in power, so were the foundations of Socialist Realism, and, by contrapositive, Formalism.

While it is nearly pointless to belabor its aesthetic foundations, the Anti-Formalist campaign had very real consequences. It buoyed the careers of Tikhon Khrennikov (now First Secretary of the Composers' Union), Dmitry Kabalevsky (originally, on the black list of Formalist composers, but successfully removed due to his connections), Isaac Dunayevsky

[21] Available in many sources, quoted from http://www.biografia.ru/arhiv/ochlit26.html, accessed January 10, 2015.
[22] "Formalism," In *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (1973), accessed January 10, 2015, http://enc-dic.com/enc_sovet/Formalizm-108827.html.
[23] Andrei Zhdanov, quoted in Boris, Schwarz *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 1917-1970* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1972), 110.

(composer of popular musical comedies, operettas, and film scores); it was all but a professional death-sentence for those denounced. The charge was led by Khrennikov, but was also validated by the noted musicologist Boris Yarustovsky, the pianist and eminent professor Alexander Goldenweiser,[24] and, worst of all, Boris Asafyev, a conservatory mate and close friend of Prokofiev's (his "speech" was read in his absence, and was largely concocted of the same talking points, as indicated by his personal notes).[25] Prokofiev and Shostakovich headed most lists, followed by Khachaturyan, Myaskovsky, Shebalin (now deposed as Director of the Moscow Conservatory), and a number of others. Official apologies and pledges to recant were expected and most composers delivered: while Shostakovich gave a nervy speech, Prokofiev, legitimately unable to attend due to his heart condition, wrote an open letter. The Composers' Union moved quickly to produce a list of banned works by those in question: these were explicitly barred from performance and publication. Organizers and performers alike feared to touch most other works by these composers, even though they were not officially disallowed. In the case of both Prokofiev and Shostakovich, they also lost an important ally at the *Muzfond*:[26] Levon Atovmyan, the director of the fund and a personal friend, was also deposed and narrowly avoided imprisonment. Financial hardship followed soon. Prokofiev went through humiliating appeals for increases in his pension, and, while he had little hope for commissions, he would not have been able to fulfil them due to failing health.

All of this was only the beginning. Shortly after, Prokofiev had yet another reality check with respect to his fateful decision to bring his family back to the USSR. Since 1938 Prokofiev had been involved in a relationship with the literary scholar and poet Mira Mendelson, almost twenty-five years his junior. Soon, Prokofiev left his wife Lina (née Codina, born in Spain and

[24] For a classmate of Rachmaninoff and one-time paramour of Leo Tolstoy's wife, these reactionary objections were actually genuine and sincere.
[25] Vishnevetsky, 584-607.
[26] *Muzfond*, or *Muzakal'nyi Fond SSSR* [The Musical Fund of the USSR] was an umbrella organization created to support and fund all musical activities from publication to publicity and performances; since its inception in 1939, it was headed by Atovmyan.

brought up in the US) for Mira. The question of marriage did not materialize later, but Lina, realizing her tenuous position in her adoptive country, did not grant Prokofiev a divorce. Late in 1947, a bizarre twist in Soviet law, annulled Prokofiev's marriage, opening the way for him to marry Mira.[27] This happy event led to yet another tragedy. In February of 1948, Lina, who had repeatedly asked for an exit visa for herself and her two sons, was summarily arrested, convicted of espionage, and sentenced to eight years in the labor camps. Prokofiev attempted to intervene on her behalf, but could do nothing beyond watching helplessly; in fact, he had to be contented that his sons Oleg and Sviatoslav did not suffer the same fate.

Shortly following Lina's arrest, another great blow came: the film director Sergei Eisenstein, Prokofiev's greatest collaborator and a close personal friend, died, following a long spell of ill health. Given his penchant for sincerity to the utmost degree, Prokofiev had enjoyed few true friendships. Fate was particularly devastating to him in this regard: his dear friend Maximillian Shmidtgof had committed suicide in 1913, his close friend and potential collaborator Vsevolod Meyerhold was shot in the Lubyanka prison in 1940, and now Eisenstein was dead. Meanwhile, Vladimir Dukelsky, a younger colleague whom he befriended while living in Paris, had moved to the US, where he had a very successful second career as writer of popular of music under the pen-name Vernon Duke; this put them beyond reach in terms of personal visits, and, following the events of early 1948, correspondence by mail as well. His two best and oldest conservatory friends Boris Asafyev and Nikolai Myaskovsky were nearby, but not available. Asafyev had already suffered from illness, but, even more importantly, was a figurehead in the Anti-Formalist campaign, even though he did not write nor deliver the speech attributed to him and gave his endorsement only under tremendous pressure; he would die shortly after, in 1950. Prokofiev's closest friend and colleague, one whose opinion he held in the highest regard, Nikolai Myaskovsky, suffered the same terrible fate that befell Prokofiev in 1948, and, having always

[27] A number of years later, Lina would later appeal successfully.

exhibited a predilection for pessimism and preference of hermitage, receded even further into his personal melancholy.

In spite of all of this, Prokofiev did continue to work as much as he could during the last five years of his life. His indefatigably sunny spirit had generated so much energy that the inertia carried him on to try again and again. However, even the most sympathetic reviewers, must admit that the output had lessened considerably, and the overwhelming drive, which had described Prokofiev's works throughout his life, no longer had the same edge. The late masterpieces, like the *Ninth Piano Sonata*, the *Cello Sonata*, and the ballet *The Tale of the Stone Flower*, are profound in lyricism, and translucent qualities, but not in the verve, which had been so essential to Prokofiev.

Chapter 2

2.1 Prokofiev Leaves Russia

As Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko led the Bolshevik assault on the Winter Palace on October 25, 1917 (Old Style; November 7, New Style) and arrested as many members of Kerensky's cabinet as he managed to capture, an event later referred to as the Great October Revolution, Prokofiev, along with his mother, was stuck in the southern resort town of Kislovodsk. With some difficulty, he managed to make it back to what was now Petrograd, and arranged with the newly appointed People's Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875-1933), formerly a middling playwright, for exit papers. Prokofiev did not wish to emigrate; he only asked for the opportunity to tour abroad for several months, thus advancing his career opportunities. Although he admonished him and declared that those who remain in Russia would never fully forgive him if he tried to move back,[28] Lunacharsky obliged and Prokofiev did not come back home until 1927, and did not move back to Russia permanently until 1936, thus spending the better part of the next eighteen years abroad.

Following the suggestions of several friends, Prokofiev decided to try his luck in America. He took a rather unusual route, riding the train east across the entire Civil War-torn Russia, then taking the boat to Japan, where he ended up playing a series of curious concerts, and, finally, San Francisco. He was briefly detained at Alcatraz under suspicion of spying: as Soviet Russia exited World War I, hostilities with former allies followed, and any Russian national was treated with caution. No formal tour was arranged, and Prokofiev eventually made New York his base of operations. He quickly discovered that his primary income would have to be made from appearances as pianist. After a short while, he also realized that presenting a program fully consisting of works of his own was professionally unviable, and drew on some of the repertoire

[28] Vishnevetsky, 190-198.

he had learned as a conservatory student[29] to produce hybrid programs. The critics did not take to his compositions kindly: Prokofiev found American musical tastes conservative, provincial, and at times amusingly silly. In interview given to *Musical America* in 1919, he noted sarcastically,

> When a critic in my country is to write about the music of a new composer, he takes the task seriously. First, he tries his best to found out as much about the music as possible. He contacts the composers, and asks him to describe the pieces or play through them. He will listen three-four, even five times; as a result, before his observations appear in print, he will have formed a good idea of the form and content. All of this is not too much of a bother for a conscientious critic, for he is interested in offering the best possible overview of the music. It seems however, this is not the method of the critics in your country.[30]

Prokofiev's pianism was praised, but not understood at depth: "a steel pianist – with steel fingers, steel biceps, steel triceps.[31]" or, even more curiously, "Bolshevik pianist."[32] He also began to develop a distaste for the life of a travelling virtuoso, especially following the arrival of his illustrious senior colleague and name-sake, Sergei Rachmaninoff. While he feigned disdain for the latter's taste (he wrote to a mutual friend that "Rachmaninoff is remarkably successful with his polkas"[33]), there was no denying his superiority. In the end, Prokofiev's greatest success was the commission he received to write and opera, and the relative ease with which he produced *The Love for the Three Oranges*; as would be true with most of Prokofiev's works for the stage, the path towards success was anything but straight for this rather odd but ultimately quite successful,

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[29] Prokofiev graduated from the Saint Petersburg Conservatory in theory/composition in 1909 and stayed on as a pianist until 1914. He resisted most of the principles his professor Anna Yesipova (1851-1914) was trying to instill in him. A former student and wife of Theodore Leschetizky (1830-1915), who had taught in Saint Petersburg for a number of years, Yesipova was especially fond of the deep singing legato touch, but was also very well known for her graceful and tasteful interpretations of the Classical repertoire. Neither the Romantic sentimental cantilena nor the lace of Mozartian pianism interested Prokofiev: since a young age, he disliked Chopin (whose pieces his mother had always wanted him to play) and Anton Rubinstein (his mother held him in higher esteem than even Tchaikovsky), and openly chastised his conservatory classmates when they expressed so much as a passing appreciation of Mozart. Almost despite himself, however, Prokofiev did learn to nuance his touch and expanded his repertoire greatly under Yesipova's tutelage. "Dry" and "percussive," epithets which have always been tossed about when describing Prokofiev's touch, need to be understood with a large grain of salt then: when compared to Yesipova's velvet, Prokofiev's approach did veer towards the iron, but it was still the touch of a pianist (!), and, when compared to the literal pounding of hammers upon keys (unfortunately, a prevailing point of view among many pianists), bore far more resemblance to the former than to the latter. Yesipova passed away several months before Prokofiev's graduation, and, in a sense, he was relieved to be on his own.

[30] Quoted in Vishnevetsky, 215.

[31] Richard Oldrich, quoted in Vishnevetsky, 210.

[32] Quoted from "Sergey Sergeyevich Prokofiev Biography," accessed January 10, 2015, http://www.quotesquotations.com/biography/sergey-seryeyevich-prokofiev/#ixzz3HPKUsBWt.

[33] Vishnevetsky, 218.

certainly the frequently performed, of his operas. However, it was apparent rather soon that making his permanent home in America was not in the cards.

Prokofiev decided to make Paris the center of operations for a while. Here, he had the support of the all-powerful Sergei Diaghilev (1872-1929) as well as another extremely influential Russian ex-patriot, Serge Koussevitzky (1874-1951), a virtuoso double bass player and composers of repute, turned conductor, publisher, impresario, and propagandist of Russian music, and, eventually, all new music. One after another, Prokofiev churned out ballets for the *Ballets Rousses* (following the earlier *Chout*, there were *Trapeze*, *Les Pas d'acier*, *The Prodigal Son*, and, after Diaghilev's death, *On the Dnieper*). Little-by-little, Diaghilev was changing his view of the composer as merely a "younger brother" of Igor Stravinsky's. Almost inevitably, each of the productions was beset by bickering and quarrels with the impresario, or the choreographer, or the dancers, or the musicians, or some such. None flopped; in fact each one was a success of some note, but none as resounding a coup as Stravinsky's big three (*Firebird*, *Petrushka*, and *The Rite of Spring*). However, the works that Prokofiev truly deemed important – his operas, especially the mystical *Fiery Angel*, and symphonies – even if performed, had no success. Sadly for Prokofiev, Diaghilev saw opera as passé and try as he might, Koussevitzky could not get the Parisian public to appreciate the serious symphonist in the composer from whom they expected upstart bravado and Scythian savagery. Meanwhile, Prokofiev was finally able to get his mother out of Russia, where she was left behind on her own for several years; he had also married and his first son Sviatoslav was born, while earning most of what he needed to sustain his family via concert appearances as pianist. At least, his *Third Piano Concerto* was a resounding success just about everywhere.

2.2 Bol'sheviziya?[34]

The end of the 1920s turned out to be pivotal. As early as 1924, Soviet representatives in the West began an aggressive campaign to court some of the most prominent Russian émigrés, never mind their professed attitude towards the Bolshevik state, back to their homeland. With this, they pursued several important goals: (1) security and the prevention of a possible Western-backed incursion into the USSR of a coalition of anti-Bolshevists of every ilk, from monarchists to anarchists and from religious fundamentalists to bourgeois liberals, were real concerns for the new authorities and intelligence gathering was as important as attempts to sway public opinion in the ex-patriot community; (2) the brain-drain as well as the culture-drain experienced by Russia during the times of the Revolution and Civil War was staggering and reversing the trend as well as luring back some of the collective culture, intellect, and skill in order to train the new generation, was of highest import; (3) every ex-patriot who did as much as speak positively on behalf of the new state, let alone visit, or better yet, return to stay, registered a major ideological victory for the authorities, endorsing the USSR and its purported new world order (the country was officially recognized by the United States and the League of Nations only after a significant push by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as late as 1933!). Not surprisingly, following the horrors they had witnessed during the preceding decade, most dismissed the overtures outright. The Nobel-prize winning writer Ivan Bunin (1870-1953) continued to produce anti-Soviet diatribes, as did the poet Konstantin Bal'mont (1867-1942), whom Prokofiev befriended in the early 1920s, whose unique poetry he set to music, and to whom he dedicated his *Third Piano Concerto*. However, many softened their scathing rhetoric and even developed some sympathy towards their erstwhile homeland, and some were persuaded to go back for a visit. Stravinsky regularly threw postcards from the Soviet Embassy into the trash and did not even visit until 1962. Chaliapin never returned but took care to distance himself from anti-Soviet crowds; his friend

[34] Derived from the word "Bol'shevik," this playful name for Soviet Russia, (along *SSSRiya*, derived from the Russian for USSR), appears quite often in Prokofiev's diaries, especially before the initial 1927 visit.

Rachmaninoff made personal donations to support the war effort after Hitler's invasion. Medtner did tour in 1927, although he declined further advances. The permanent return of the important writer Alexander Kuprin (1870-1938) was a major coup.

Vladimir Potemkin, a scion of one of the most important Russian princely families, who now served as a cultural emissary in Paris, had initiated official contact with Prokofiev. The tactics included using Soviets abroad: the influence of the writer Maxim Gorky, who was living in Italy, but continuing to represent the Soviet Union, was enormous, and Prokofiev had several important discussions on the subject with him; a collaboration with the revolutionary stage director Vsevolod Meyerhold was promised – a prize the composer coveted, especially in the context of his attempts to produce *The Fiery Angel*; the Soviet artist Georgi Yakulov was dispatched to Paris in order to produce a ballet on Soviet themes (*Le Pas d'Acier*) with Diaghilev's troupe. In the end, Prokofiev was persuaded to tour the USSR.

The 1927 tour has been examined from many angles. The colorful and detailed commentary that the composer's diary[35] provides, corroborates the story of utter triumph, even as it documents some of the fears he and Lina had before entering *Bol'sheviziya* as well as a number of the "idiosyncrasies" of Soviet life, which Prokofiev's acerbic wit could not fail to lampoon (bureaucracy, dress, the growing importance of his erstwhile light-hearted conservatory chums). That he was treated like a dignitary and that his music was performed more seriously and conscientiously and simply *more*, and that he was greeted whole-heartedly and simply *more* than ever is a consensus among all that have reported on it. Prokofiev had always attempted to appear above approval: he was aware of the enormity of his gift from a rather young age and his confidence in this gift as well as his impeccable work ethic did not allow his belief in himself to flicker – he could not stoop so low as to seek endorsement actively; and yet he clearly yearned for it. Certainly, the fierce competitor in him was satisfied. Among other things, the tour coincided

[35] Sergei Prokofiev, *Diaries: 1907-1933*. 3 vols. (Paris: Sprkfv, 2002), Vol. 2, 457-553.

with Nikolai Medtner's brief return, and, much to the composer's delight, eclipsed the latter's entirely. Prokofiev scored another personal triumph with Glazunov: he watched the old Conservatory Director squirm as he, who had developed a real distaste for Prokofiev towards the end of his stay at the Conservatory, had to deliver a panegyric to his younger colleague – this time it was not about the praise but about the satisfaction of seeing Glazunov suffer through the delivery. After dozens of concerts in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Kharkov, Odessa (famously attended by the teen-aged David Oistrakh and the pre-teens Emil Gilels and Sviatoslav Richter), and other cities, the whirlwind tour came to an end but only left the composer wanting more.

Over the course of the next eight years, Prokofiev would invest more and more of himself in his homeland. By 1935, Prokofiev's career had gone through a complete turn-around: he was now spending more time in the USSR than abroad, the bulk of his commissions, performances, and publications were there, and the ties tethering him to Paris and America had grown weaker. Koussevitzky became the highly influential music director of the Boston Symphony and moved to the United States permanently in 1929. Prokofiev was not interested in following him. The musical America was intriguing, but he did not feel that it was the place for him. Diaghilev's death in the same year was not entirely unexpected but a tremendous shock to everyone all the same. Meanwhile, the Stock Market Crash of 1929 signaled the end of the Roaring 20's and the beginning of the plunge the world was about take, thereby making the West less desirable in every sense. As early as the second tour of the Soviet Union (that same year, 1929), Prokofiev had an alarming encounter: he experienced his first *chistka* ("cleanse"), a public gathering, during which the object of the "cleansing" is subjected to a series of questions/proclamations meant to test his fundamental loyalty to the Soviet state, hence potential fitness as a member of the society. Just a short while later, a frenzy of such *chistkas* would sweep through the land, precipitating in millions of denunciations, followed by convictions. Prokofiev deflected all of the questions, especially accusation of anti-Soviet activities (as embodied by *Le Pas d'Acier*, the very ballet Prokofiev wrote with the intent to ingratiate himself with the Soviets). He had zealously thrown

himself into one of his favorite pastimes – solving a puzzle; the object of this game was to construct a logical argument whereby his permanent return home was a good idea.

2.3 The Return: Classic Theories

Two opposing theories concerning Prokofiev's return to his native land had presided over scholarship, criticism, and performance throughout most of the twentieth century. Conveniently, these coincided with the political divisions which governed the world through the bulk of the period. For Westerners, the return was the single most disastrous decision of Prokofiev's life: his life, both professional and personal was destroyed utterly and his promise as composer largely demolished. The émigré musicologist Victor Seroff pulled no punches in describing the systematic destruction the composer suffered under the Soviet regime. While direct in point and understandable in tone, the account does clearly exhibit the lack of information regarding the vicissitudes of Soviet life available in the West. Seroff's credibility is significantly undermined by a staggering number of basic mistakes (misspelled names, geographical gaffes, spurious dates) as well as simply scandalous hypotheses.[36]

On the other side of the Iron Curtain, Izrail' Nestyev's books on Prokofiev gave a diametrically opposing view of the composer's career abroad and before his return home. Interestingly, Nestyev's first book was based on his doctoral dissertation and published, of all places, in New York, in 1947. The original Russian text never saw the press, perhaps at least in part due to the events of 1948, but also because of Nestyev's ultimate betrayal of the great composer he had befriended while still a graduate student. His 1957 volume is still officially

[36] The most spectacular claim that Seroff makes is that Prokofiev's marriage to Mira was one of convenience. As a niece of Lazar Kaganovich, one of Stalin's favorite subordinates (and one who did survive ALL the purges to live well into his nineties), the relation to Mira, according to Seroff, was a way for Prokofiev to shield himself. This, unfortunately, has zero logic, as, among other things, there was absolutely no assurance, that Kaganovich would not suffer the plight of his many colleagues (a fact Seroff himself mentions just a few pages earlier in describing the fate of Mikhail Tukhachevsky, one of the five supreme Marshals of the Soviet armed forces, who was shot, along with two other Marshals in 1937), and be denounced in yet another wave of *chistki* ("cleansings"). In fact, one of Kaganovich's own brother shot himself in 1941 with an imminent arrest looming. Even more importantly, Mira Mendelson was NOT related to Lazar Kaganovich!

listed as an edition of the same one that appeared in English and French ten years earlier, although they bear little resemblance. The 1973 *Zhizn' Sergeya Prokofieva* (*The Life of Sergei Prokofiev*) is a different text altogether, as by the time he was working on it, both the ire of the Anti-Formalist campaign and the *slight easing* of the very same campaign (although not when it came to visual arts nor younger composers such as Schnittke, Denisov, and Gubaidulina), perpetrated at least in part during the Khruschev-era *Ottepel* (Thaw), had given way to the Brezhnev-era *Zastoy* (Stagnation). All three, and especially the 1957 work, posit the view that Prokofiev's years in the West were fruitless, and only upon his return to his homeland, which Soviet musicology tended to list as early as 1933, was the composer able to realize his potential fully. In true Soviet fashion, Nestyev did not bat an eye when lacing this overwhelming approval of the composer's time in his Soviet Motherland with the ubiquitous attacks on the composer's formalist tendencies.

2.4 The Return: Post-Soviet Views

As the Cold War subsided, more nuanced views on the subject appeared. A prevailing theory among Russian musicians who survived the depredations of Soviet life and finally had a chance to speak freely, especially following the demise of the Soviet Union, was that Prokofiev was basically duped into moving back. The amazing reception which Prokofiev enjoyed in 1927 had gone to his head. This was followed by great promises, some of which did actually come to fruition, most importantly serious commissions for large-scale works and a great number of high-quality performances. Mainly, there was the possibility of collaboration with some of the best creative teams (directors, artists, theater technicians), while being backed by the endless resources of government support. This was what he really was seeking: culturally fertile soil, the highest level of artistic achievement, and a complete freedom from peddling to fickle public tastes. However, this was merely a dream, and Soviet authorities did all they could to continue to feed it, while reality was progressively worsening. 1927 signaled the end of the so-called New Economic

Policy (NEP) in Soviet Russia, a doctrine which re-introduced some forms of private property, thereby aiding the national economy and raising the standard of living beyond the squalor of post-Revolutionary years, although never nearing that of pre-WWI levels. NEP gave Soviet citizens true hope for a comfortable life in the future and Prokofiev's visit coincided with its pinnacle.[37] Later in the year, Stalin rescinded the policy, the living conditions sharply changed for the worse and the horrors of collectivization would follow rather soon.

In terms of freedom, both artistic and personal, early 1927 was also absolutely unusual: the ravages of war had finally subsided and the stupendous Russian avant-guard movement achieved somewhat of a re-birth as the brash, self-assured, and life-affirming Soviet avant-guard. However, the first major purge event, following the dubious Trotskist plot[38] was initiated in October of that year. This touched off a period of ever-escalating terror, culminating in the Great Purges of 1937 and 1938, which, among the millions, claimed the lives of dozens of would-be collaborators for Prokofiev. Of these, the most important was Meyerhold, but also a true kindred spirit the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, whose sincere belief in the Soviet state was shaken by the events of the late 1920s and led him to take his own life in 1930. All of this was overshadowed in Prokofiev's mind by his first great visit in January-March of 1927. Professor Dubinsky recollects, as similarly did cellist Mstislav Rostropovich (1927-2007), and the composer Alfred Schnittke (1934-1998),[39] that Soviet authorities did all they could to trap Prokofiev into thinking that the amazing reception he had during his first trip back was going to be the rule; they appealed to his vanity and competitive spirit, they enlisted the help of those whom he trusted, they made grand promises and kept just enough of them to continue stringing him along. The final promise was that he would always be allowed to tour the West. This was broken, of course: following his

[37] This was still quite far from what Prokofiev could enjoy in the West, as Lina quickly recognized; the diaries mention shopping trips with much sarcasm!
[38] Trotsky was eventually expelled from the USSR and later, while living in Mexico, killed by a hired assassin.
[39] *The People's Artist*, 388.

permanent move to Moscow in 1936, Prokofiev had exactly *one* (!) trip abroad, and the gate shut permanently in 1938.

Post-Cold War scholarship in the West had added some other important details. Among the more obvious considerations were finances. That Prokofiev was second-fiddle to Rachmaninoff in America and to Stravinsky in Europe is often brought up. That there was only so much room for a resident Russian composer, especially *the* resident composer on the market, is definitely true. Also, Prokofiev had to earn much of his living as pianist, and as such, his formidable pianism and unique interpretations aside, he could not compete with Rachmaninoff, nor Joseph Hoffmann, Joseph Lhevinne, Artur Rubinstein, Alexander Borovsky, and the emerging Vladimir Horowitz, to name just a handful of those who were representing the former Russian Empire at the piano. Moreover, he really did not enjoy the life of a traveling virtuoso and truly did not *see* himself as a pianist (the diaries are full of complaints on the subject of practicing!). In addition, Diaghilev's death and Koussevitzky's move away from Europe, took away his serious patrons. Hence, the contention is that finances were always tight for Prokofiev, and he was actively seeking a way out. The ever-increasing patronage of the Soviet Union, while a welcome relief at first, became a tool for leverage. Simon Morrison quotes Gabriel Paitchadze, a fellow émigré and a friend of Prokofiev's during his time in Paris:

> The vacillation between the West and the East would have continued even longer if he had not been given to understand within Soviet circles that he had to bring his dual existence to an end and relocate to Russia and become an official Soviet composer. In sum, he would no longer be permitted to take trips to Russia.[40]

The latter Prokofiev knew he simply could not afford, and, thus his hand was forced.

While presenting important information which counters the view of Prokofiev's dependence on Diaghilev, thus giving less credence to the patronage argument, Morrison touches upon two other important considerations, both of which are far from the mundane and have to do with Prokofiev's set of beliefs and his psyche. First, there is his intense dedication to Christian

[40] *The People's Artist*, 30.

Science. Following a brief introduction to the teachings of Mary Baker Eddy during his first trip to the United States, Prokofiev found himself drawn more and more to them. Here he found a world-view which allowed for a reconciliation of philosophy, mysticism, and scientific logic. He felt at home immediately. The diaries abound with entries that relate to various aspects of both the tenets and the practice itself. Perhaps apropos to Prokofiev's inability to detect or give full credence or even willful desire to overlook the ever-increasing horrors of Stalinism was that

> Christian Science sees evil as unreal, since evil is a temporal entity; when time does not exist, all that is temporal is unreal… a person's acceptance of good and rejection of evil is a symptom of the maturation of his individuality.[41]

The boundless optimism as well as the high value that Prokofiev saw in morality (especially with respect to art and work in general) combined with this rather extreme view of good and evil to create a logical system whereby the privations of Soviet existence could be perceived (!) as negligible. Morrison is at his most disarming, however, in his opening statement, "According to those who knew him best, Sergey [*sic*] Prokofiev led an impulsive, impetuous life in the moment."[42] Thus, for all the professed precision and logic, Prokofiev's decision could have been a monstrously simple whim[43] and all the arguments were constructed to retrofit what already was a foregone conclusion in both his heart and mind.

Prokofiev's newest Russian biographers present another consideration: his growing sense of awareness of Russia's special place in the world. Far from being a construct of the current Kremlin doctrine, this attitude, with its inherent anti-Western undertones, had been in play in Russia's perception of self since at least the times of Ivan the Terrible. As Russia's economy made advances in the early 20th century, and as its culture followed suit (Diaghilev helped greatly), a momentum was created; during the years immediately following the Revolution, with all its trials and tribulations, the sense of wounded pride fueled these feelings among the émigrés

[41] *Diaries*, Vol. II, 326.
[42] *The People's Artist*, 1.
[43] That Prokofiev was given to whim is corroborated by virtually everyone who knew him.

and Prokofiev was well aware. *Eurasianism* coalesced as a quasi-political current, although it consisted primarily of cultural leaders, who vaguely sought to advance the Russian cause. A friend of Prokofiev's (and of Stravinsky's for that matter), Pyotr Souvchinsky (1892-1985) was a highly influential polymath, a music critic and patron, and, one of the most important members of the *Eurasianist* circle. In 1922, he persuaded Prokofiev to attend what some refer to as a congress of *Eurasianists*, during which the key tenets of the movement were discussed:

(1) "world" culture, as the West would have it, is dominated solely by the Romano-Germanic roots of its political dominators; as such, it cannot represent the whole world, and in fact is at odds with much of the world;

(2) Russia differs from the West in fundamental ways and, due to its geography (most of the Eurasian continent) and history, can better represent the content as a whole;

(3) the spirit of Orthodox Christianity, with its emphasis on community collective and compassion, is superior to the rigid hierarchy, sophistic legalism, and base political ambition of Catholicism and all of the reactionary Protestant movements;

(4) with its idiomatic and endemic pathos, Russia will lead the world;

(5) a new world and a "New West," i.e. Russia, is emerging and a bright future awaits those who join in;

(6) all inspired and industrious human endeavor is isomorphic: the sincere and well-crafted work of a poet is equivalent to that of successful businessman, and a highly skilled symphonist is as important as an honest politician.[44]

That much of this resonated with the composer is confirmed by a plethora of biographical facts, and directly corroborated by the diaries; that it may have played a role in his decision to move back, is an intriguing possibility.

[44] Paraphrased from Vishnevetsky, 302-10.

Chapter 3

3.1 "A New Simplicity" and the "Lines"

No discussion of as fateful a decision in the life of a *composer* as this Return turned out to be for Prokofiev should be complete without some consideration of the artist's aesthetics and, more specifically, musical tastes. Yet, none of the available literature even attempts to look for a connection. The 20th century, having inherited a strong strain of self-consciousness from Romanticism and engaged in contentious dialogue with this very legacy, abounds with composer manifestos.[45] Prokofiev's considerable literary gifts[46] never produced a volume specifically dedicated to his beliefs, although his biographical writings speak to his ethics, and certainly his diaries are a treasure trove of data, both specific and conceptualized, on his tastes. However, there are several important documents in which he does speak directly of his musical origins and goals. Of these, two stand out especially: the 1934 *Izvestiya* article entitled "The Path of Soviet Music,"[47] and the oft-misquoted passage from his *Autobiography*, in which he assays the "lines" according to which his music developed following his graduation from conservatory. In that the former appeared in an official Soviet newspaper (second in importance only to *Pravda*), hence had to endure the tightest of all editorships/censorships, and was intended for the widest of audiences, its positions fit the Malcolm Brown formula of an "attempt to reconcile inspiration with political mandate"[48] at best. In fact, much of what Prokofiev stated in the article is summarily dismissed as pandering; however, musical evidence suggests otherwise. Prokofiev speaks of writing "big," and expounds that Soviet music should be grand in scope and executed on the highest technical level so as to reflect the epochal social change the USSR believed to be

[45] Stravinsky's *Poetics of Music*, Hindemith's *The Craft of Musical Composition*, Copland's *What to Listen for in Music*, Medtner's *The Muse and Fashion*, to mention just a few.
[46] He claimed that, had he not become a musician, literature would have been his vocation.
[47] The article appeared on November 16, 1934; here and below, the quotes and other references are from the text of the article as re-printed in Semyon Shlifshteyn, ed., *S. S. Prokof'ev: Materialy, Dokumenty, Vospominaniia* [S. S. Prokofiev: Materials, Documents, Remembrances], 2d ed. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal'noe Izdatel'stvo, 1961), 214-15.
[48] See Footnote 1 above.

experiencing and to engage audiences numbering in the millions. For the same reasons, the music should be "'light-serious' or 'serious-light'" and, above all, melodious. This melody should be "simple and understandable," while all technical elements leading to writing that is "clear and simple, but not stenciled." Thus, this music was to represent a "new simplicity." Inasmuch as this language is in striking concert with the foundational axioms of Socialist Realism (as applied to music, although not until much later), it is easy to make the conclusion that Prokofiev was simply appeasing, if not outright facetious (especially in light of the attacks he suffered later). The music, however, very much speaks to the contrary: no greater clarity of form is possible than that of the first movement of the *Sixth Piano Sonata*, no grander scope than that of the *Cantata for the Twentieth Anniversary of October*, and no more penetrating a lyricism and melodism than that of the ballet *Prodigal Son* (crucially, written several years *prior* to the memorandum on "new simplicity" and *not* expressly intended for the USSR).

While the theses of an *Izvestiya* publication are a rather logical target for skepticism, Prokofiev's thoughts on his style as spelled out in the *Autobiography*, are harder to dismiss. At the close of the chapter in which describes his years at the Conservatory,[49] Prokofiev describes the main "lines" according to which his creative work was developing. He lists (1) the Classical, (2) the Innovative, (3) the Toccata, or Motor, and (4) the Lyrical. He goes on to decry the possibility of a fifth line, which "some strive to stick to me," and, while admitting the recurrence of a *scherzoso* quality in his compositions, he protests against the application of the term "grotesque" to this trait. For each he provides specific sources (composers, specific pieces, or seminal events during his formative years) and lists several examples of his compositions (to date and somewhat later). Some qualifications about the text must be made: mainly, the *Autobiography* was written and printed in the USSR, hence subject to the same censorship as anything else. However, the political pressure on Prokofiev at the time of the writing of this

[49] Here and below, the quotes and other references are from the text of the *Autobiography* as re-printed in *Materialy*, 148-49.

famous passage with the "lines" of development was at its lightest; also, when constructing the narrative, Prokofiev's intentions were primarily personal, even specifically literary, hence not bearing any massive message and less likely to be insincere even in the slightest (if Prokofiev could manage to be insincere in the first place!). Scholars and amateurs alike see this as Prokofiev's artistic credo. Virtually every discussion of Prokofiev's music, style, aesthetics, biography, etc., includes a reference to the "lines" and virtually NONE goes even as far as quote it correctly! All the more then, the passage deserves a precise and thorough examination.

Firstly, a staggering number of sources (scholarly sources included!) blithely refer to these as "five lines"[50] and directly refer to the fifth line as "grotesque" – never mind Prokofiev's protestation to the appellation, as stated in the very same passage! Secondly, many apply the "lines" as a recipe for describing *all* of Prokofiev's music, while the passage clearly states that the discussion is concerned with the years during and immediately following the Conservatory. Thirdly, it is largely ignored that Prokofiev does draw a distinction between what he calls neo-Classicism (Classical **form and balance**) and direct imitation of compositions from the 18th century (Classical "**appearance**"), both of which are listed as belonging to the "first" line, and gives separate origins and examples for each. Fourthly, Prokofiev's understanding of "innovation" as "primarily harmonic" (hence, budding from and rooted in tradition), but also in part "melodic turns, instrumentation, and dramaturgy," rules out any thought of a willful and radical break with tradition–a very common misrepresentation. Sixthly, the toccata/motor line is frequently brought to the fore, while Prokofiev expressly states that is in fact "the least valuable." This is especially rampant among performers, and nothing short of criminal negligence on the part of pianists! Finally, and most importantly, Prokofiev clearly gives the most value to the final (fourth!) line: the lyrical. He spends the most time explaining it, gives the greatest number of

[50] A simple internet search with the keywords "Prokofiev" and "five lines" produces a deluge of "hits," a great number of them scholarly articles and/or capstone documents.

variations ("lyrical-contemplative" at first, later more associated with long melody) and examples of compositions. He closes this seminal discussion ruefully:

> This line remained unnoticed, or would be noticed in hindsight. For a long while, most outright denied [the presence of] lyricism in my music, and, unencouraged, it developed slowly. However, as time passed I paid more and more attention to it.

Thus, *only* the lyrical line *expressly* went beyond the years immediately following the Conservatory, or, at the very least, it was the lyrical line that Prokofiev wanted to promote at the time of the writing of the *Autobiography*, and it is with respect to this lyrical line that the composer felt victimized. The published *Diaries* only go as far as 1933, but it is telling that from the mid-1920s on, they are replete with entries which deplore this very denial or discouragement of all things lyrical in his music. In a sense, he was a victim of the successes of his other music: Paris valued him for the savagery and shock value of the *Scythian Suite* (*not* its lyricism) and the light-heartedness and charm of the *Classical Symphony*, while America respected his "steel biceps" pianism. On the other hand, a direct continuation of Romantic lyricism, as with Rachmaninoff and Medtner in the Russian vein, or Richard Strauss in the German, meant largely going back to old semantics and, above all, *giving up* on the future, hence a non-starter for the optimist and futurist[51] Prokofiev since *The Giant*, an opera he wrote as a nine-year-old[52]. In any case, Prokofiev clearly felt about this very deeply and was actively seeking an outlet for this foundational principle of his personality.

3.2 Prodigal Son

Increasingly, Prokofiev felt frustrated with the path which career was following. It is in this light that we argue that the composer fell into an artistic trap of his own making. The pivotal compositions in this regard are the ballet *The Prodigal Son* and the *Fourth Symphony*, largely

[51] We use the lower case in order to differentiate from the artistic current known as Futurism, with which Prokofiev was familiar (his *Diaries* contain an interesting account of his meeting with Marinetti, the movement's leader) but which he never intended to join.
[52] However, in difference with the rest of the world (even to this day!), Prokofiev realized that all three were important harmonic innovators

based on the musical material of the ballet. The ballet premiered in May of 1929 and was a relative success. Prokofiev's frustration with the production was absolute, however. He quarreled with Boris Kochno, the latest in a litany of Diaghilev's amorous interests and to whom the impresario assigned to co-write the libretto; he was annoyed by Serge Lifar (a former flame of Diaghilev's), who created the lead character; he openly chastised the young choreographer George Balanchine,[53] who was only starting to make a name for himself, and even scandalously refused to pay him; the bones of contention were realism (!) and simplicity (!), both of which Prokofiev wanted more. He felt that the distilled and open-hearted lyricism of the music largely fell on deaf ears, and, even though his colleagues (including Stravinsky!) congratulated him, this was not the grandiose, life-changing success he felt he deserved.[54] The symphony, based on the materials of the ballet and commissioned by Koussevitzky for the fiftieth anniversary of the Boston Symphony, was an unmitigated flop, both in America and in Europe.

That Prokofiev identified with the title character of *The Prodigal Son* is obvious; that he perceived the Father from the parable to represent his homeland is easily conceivable. Unlike most Russians in Paris, he never gave up his Soviet citizenship and never fully considered himself an émigré, thus remaining a Son. What hung over him, was Lunacharsky's pronouncement (see above): the Brother which remained would not be amused by the total forgiveness granted to the Prodigal by the Father. However, the Father prevails in the parable and, as Prokofiev hoped, would be the case with his return. For all of Rachmaninoff's well-documented nostalgia, he never considered seriously even a visit back to his homeland; to him, it was gone, just like his piano, which the mob through off the balcony. It was the optimist Prokofiev who yearned to emulate the biblical prodigal son and did attempt to do so, with appropriately (for a society where all religion

[53] A fascinating account of Prokofiev's scandalous behavior towards Balanchine is given in the choreographer's conversations with Solomon Volkov, published as *Balanachine's Tchaikovsky* (New York: Doubleday, 1985). While the latter's credibility has been under some question, the account is corroborated by both Harlow Robinson and Igor Vishnevetsky.

[54] For all his disdain for Scriabin, Prokofiev was looking for a world-changing happening surprisingly akin to Scriabin's grandiose visions.

was denounced as "the opium of the people"[55]) less-than-biblical results. He had convinced himself that his compatriots would finally greet him with true understanding and reward him for speaking from the heart, with sincere lyricism and universal simplicity. The *Romeo and Juliet* was the pivotal divine sign that assured him.

[55] Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, accessed January 10, 2015, http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm.

Chapter 4

4.1 *Romeo and Juliet* and the Mangled Hopes

The Leningrad State Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet (GATOB), formerly the Imperial Mariinsky, and later, the Kirov Theater, approached Prokofiev with an offer to produce a large-scale ballet. Prokofiev jumped at the idea – at long last he had a chance to write a "big" one:

> We [Russians] love long ballets that fill up an entire evening. Abroad they prefer them shorter and offer either three one-act ballets in an evening, or a one-act ballet together with a short opera.[56]

This seemingly benign passage is a hidden dig, steeped in *Eurasianism*: the West wants art to be more akin to entertainment, while the Russian soul yearns for a deeper experience and art must approach the quasi-religious. In seeking a subject for this "deeper experience," Prokofiev brainstormed with the trusted Asafyev and the critic and playwright Adrian Piotrovsky (1898-1937), and quickly came up with a shortlist of three timeless love stories (what could be a better vehicle for lyricism?): *Pelleas and Melisande*, *Tristan and Isolde*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. *Romeo and Juliet* won, in part due to the fact that Prokofiev had seen a production of the Shakespeare original (in Russian) as directed by Sergei Radlov (1892-1958). He had known the outstanding director since the chess-playing years of their youth, and really loved Radlov's production of *The Love for Three Oranges* he saw in Leningrad in 1927. The opportunity for a collaboration was too hard to pass up. Also, Radlov had been the most prominent disciple of Meyerhold, with whom Prokofiev had been yearning to work for quite some time, and, although the master and student had had a public falling out, Radlov's approach intrigued Prokofiev and made him very enthusiastic about the possibility. True to his organized form, Prokofiev quickly produced a synopsis of the play, and a compositional plan, whereby Shakespeare's action was broken into fifty-odd "numbers," for each of which the composer devised a musical character and envisioned

[56] *Materialy*, 69.

balletic action.[57] Along with Radlov, the choreographer Rostislav Zakharov, initially also involved in the project, convinced Prokofiev to make several important changes so as to turn the play into a ballet. Of these, the most significant was that the ballet was to end happily: Romeo was warned about Juliet's fake death and arrived at the Capulet crypt only to whisk his bride away. At least two reasons for this radical change arose: (1) dead characters cannot dance; (2) the life-affirming finish was more in line with the official Soviet doctrine of ever-increasing cheer, enthusiasm, and general happiness.

Even before Prokofiev wrote a note of the music, Radlov moved to the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow, and, after some vacillation, Prokofiev followed him. Among other things, this gave him access to Polenovo: a summer retreat facility located in a picturesque small town on the river Tarusa, less than 100 miles from Moscow. He had the luxury of a small private apartment (a converted bath house!), meals, supplies, and, once the troupe of the theater left to begin preparations for the fall season, nearly total privacy and concentration. Prokofiev could not be happier: (1) he could focus on composition absolutely and entirely; (2) the subject material was absolutely of his choice and to his liking; (3) he could dive fully into a lyrical subject and was convinced that sincere, simple writing would finally be rewarded; (4) his collaborators were top notch and the totality of their work was assured greatness; (5) given the standards of the Bolshoi ballet troupe and orchestra, the level of performance would be the highest possible; (6) financial security was guaranteed, given the lucrative terms of the contract and the relative cheapness of living in the USSR; (7) he was clearly receiving special treatment from everyone – colleagues, audiences, and authorities alike – and found it intoxicating. While his career in the West had been respectable, he could not have dreamed of enjoying the confluence of all these factors either in Europe or in America. He completed the piano score in a matter of four of months and took just a few more weeks to orchestrate most of it, all while working on a number of other projects. Even

[57] See Deborah Wilson's excellent "Romeo and Juliet: History of the Compromise" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State Univ., 2003.)

by Prokofiev's prodigious standards, this was staggering. It was *this project* and *this summer* that convinced him once and for all to give up his apartment in Paris and, along with his family, move to Moscow permanently.

The demise of the project was sudden and began with an event that at first, did not seem to concern Prokofiev at all. On January 28, 1936 the infamous unsigned editorial entitled "Muddle Instead of Music" appeared in *Pravda*; less than two weeks later, on February 6, another editorial, "Falsehood in Ballet," continued in the same vein. These were attacks directed at Dmitry Shostakovich, Prokofiev's younger and all-Soviet rival, and has even been construed by some to have been to Prokofiev's advantage.[58] Nothing could be further from the truth: while the specific target was Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, this was a trigger event, which quickly magnified to affect all music for the theater and eventually all theater and all music (the seeds of 1948 were certainly sown here). But this touched Prokofiev and *Romeo and Juliet* even sooner than that: the librettist for Shostakovich's ballet "The Limpid Stream," the target of the second diatribe, was none other than Adrian Piotrovsky. Even though his role in *Romeo and Juliet* was rather limited, theater administrators would not touch any project connected to him (Piotrovsky would be executed just over a year later) and Prokofiev's dream production was shut down. One of the official reasons given was, ironically, the happy ending: with their life-affirming change to the original, the collaborators were looking to score some point with the overseers of Socialist Realism, but instead were accused of vulgarly desecrating Shakespeare.[59]

4.2 Lavrovsky

Prokofiev spent the next two years hunting for a theater which would produce his *Romeo*. He fashioned two orchestral suites (premiered in November of 1936 and April of 1937

[58] Thankfully, arguments that *this* indeed was the reason for Prokofiev's return have largely been defeated.
[59] *Materialy*, 194.

respectively) out of the musical material of the ballet. Prokofiev had engaged in a number of such salvage projects, but this one was different: these suites were meant as advertising for the ballet, thus allowing the public to get to know the music and possibly create momentum for a staging. The results were unusual in that an abridged version did finally take place in December of 1938, but, of all places, in Brno, in what for a few more months remained as independent Czechoslovakia[60]. Meanwhile, after a number of attempts all over the USSR did not come to fruition, the same theater that initiated the project, now known as The Kirov, assigned the choreographer Leonid Lavrovsky to look into reviving the production.

The collaboration with Lavrovsky was thorny from the start: even though Prokofiev was beside himself about the possibility of the ballet finally seeing the stage, he was dismayed by the choreographer's requests for changes.[61] Per the censors' requirements, the ending had to be changed, and Prokofiev obliged. The composer fought all other changes tooth and nail, refused to compose new material, and even boycotted rehearsals, but eventually gave in on most counts. Lavrovsky went so far as attempting to insert the Scherzo from the *Second Piano Sonata* (unorchestrated) in order to support balletic action he had envisioned; Prokofiev eventually wrote a new number. Having been used to the lush melodism, opulent orchestration, convenient phrasing and straight-forward rhythm of the classic Tchaikovsy-Petipa productions, the dancers gawked at Prokofiev's take on *Romeo and Juliet*. They complained about the unpredictable melodism, crunchy harmonies, "undanceable" rhythm and inaudible orchestration, and threatened to strike shortly before opening night. The legendary ballerina and creator of the role of Juliet, Galina Ulanova, was reported to have quipped, "Never was a tale of greater woe than Prokofiev's music for *Romeo*."[62] In one instance, Prokofiev protested, "you need drums instead of music!"[63] and did not yield to a request to change his very subtle orchestration until he literally walked

[60] Hitler seized a large portion just a few months earlier, and would devour the whole country soon after.
[61] Leonid Lavrovsky, quoted in *Materialy*, 514-17.
[62] Galina Ulanova, quoted in Wilson, 1.
[63] Galina Ulanova, quoted in *Materialy*, 433.

through the choreography on stage and realized that the orchestra could not be heard upstage. In the end, however, the January 11, 1940 premiere was a resounding success. For Lavrovsky, already an established choreographer, this was a strong career boost. For Ulanova, her first true signature role, and the beginning of a lasting creative partnership with a composer, who would go on to create *Cinderella* and *The Tale of the Stone Flower* with her in mind. For Prokofiev, this would be as close as he would come to experiencing the status he had been promised and of which he thought he had had a foretaste during his 1927 trip. All three would reunite for the Bolshoi premiere, a virtually identical production, on December 28, 1946 – this led to international notice.[64] Deborah Wilson presents important evidence which suggests that Prokofiev continued to consider many of the changes he had made for Lavrovsky illegitimate and never ceased to try to produce the original version of the ballet. Nevertheless, it is the 1940 Kirov version that has stuck.

[64] *The People's Artist*, 110.

Chapter 5

5.1 The Ballet, the Orchestral Suites, and *Ten Pieces*

> I made two symphonic suites from the ballet, each consisting of seven movements. They do not follow each other consecutively; both suites develop parallel to each other. Some numbers were taken directly from the ballet without alteration, others were compiled from different sources within it. These two suites do not cover the entire music and I will perhaps be able to make a third. In addition to the suites I compiled a collection of ten pieces for piano, selecting the parts best suited for transcription. The suites were performed before the ballet was produced.[65]

While the *Third Suite* did appear in 1946, none of the music included in it corresponds with the *Ten Pieces*. Thus, the first two are of greater interest to us as they are directly related to the piano transcriptions. The 1935 piano score is the source for both of the suites and the *Ten Pieces* and, as such, the music is as close to the original intended by the composer as possible. This is especially true of the piano pieces, as nine of the ten are "taken directly from the ballet without alteration." Since the early 1920s it had been the composer's systematic approach to compose orchestral music in piano score[66] and write the intended orchestration directly into this version. None of Prokofiev's many piano transcriptions *add* to the original. Considering the composer's stipulation of "selecting the best parts suited for transcription," which means that the original was "playable" on piano and not much, if anything, needed to be *removed*, we get that the music of the *Ten Pieces* is virtually identical to that of the original score of the ballet. The significant changes are in the order in which the various scenes transcribed for piano appear in the ballet. Having had access it, Deborah Wilson was able to find most correspondences between the two orchestral suites and the 1935 score. Table 1 applies these to op. 75. In that the two suites "develop parallel to each other" we find a fundamental structural difference between them and the set for piano. Nine of the ten pieces, with the exception of No. 8 "Mercutio," do come from the two suites, but the narrative arc is decidedly different, as shown in Table 2.

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[65] *Materialy*, 194.
[66] Detailed descriptions in Morrison, Robinson, and Vishnevetsky.

1935 Piano Score	*Ten Pieces*, op. 75
3. The Street Awakens	2. Scene
9. The Young Juliet	4. The Young Juliet
10. Arrival of the Guests	3. Minuet
11. Masks	5. Masks
12. Dance of the Knights	6. Montagues and Capulets
Juliet Dances with Paris	
Dance of the Knights to the end	
14. Mercutio	8. Mercutio
19. Folk Dance	1. Folk Dance
26. Romeo at Friar Laurence's	7. Friar Laurence
47. Dance of the Antilles Girls	9. Dance of the Girls with Lilies
36. Romeo and Juliet	10. Romeo and Juliet before Parting
45. Juliet Alone	

Table 1. The 1935 Piano Score and *Ten Pieces from* Romeo and Juliet, op. 75: A Comparison by Number.

Suite One, op. 64-bis	*Ten Pieces*, op. 75
1. Folk Dance	1. Folk Dance
2. Scene (the Street Awakens)	2. Scene
3. Madrigal	
4. Minuet (the Arrival of the Guests)	3. Minuet
5. Masks	5. Masks
6. Romeo and Juliet	
7. Death of Tybalt	
Suite Two, op. 64-ter	
1. Montagues and Capulets	6. Montagues and Capulets (without the opening "Prince's Decree")
2. The Young Juliet	4. The Young Juliet
3. Friar Laurence	7. Friar Laurence
4. Dance	
5. Romeo and Juliet before Parting	10. Romeo and Juliet before Parting
6. Dance of the Girls with Lilies	9. Dance of the Girls with Lilies
7. Romeo at Juliet's Grave	

Table 2. *Orchestral Suite No. 1*, op. 64-bis, and *No. 2*, op. 64-ter, and *Ten Pieces from* Romeo and Juliet, op. 75: A Comparison by Number.

Due to the changes made for the Lavrovsky production, the standard version of the full score differs in some features. In addition to whole new numbers, Lavrovsky insisted on introductions, interpolated phrases (usually square), connective music, and repeated sections. The correspondence of the standard score to *Ten Pieces* is shown in Table 3.

3. The Street Awakens	2. Scene
10. The Young Juliet (minus 10 final measures)	4. The Young Juliet
11. Arrival of the Guests	3. Minuet
12. Masks (minus 14 final measures)	5. Masks
13. Dance of the Knights (I) (minus Dance of the Ladies) (minus Dance of the Knights (II)) Juliet Dances with Paris (minus 12 measures) Dance of the Knights (III) to the end	6. Montagues and Capulets
15. Mercutio	8. Mercutio
22. Folk Dance	1. Folk Dance
28. Romeo at Friar Laurence's (minus 9 final measures)	7. Friar Laurence
49. Dance of the Antilles Girls	9. Dance of the Girls with Lilies
38. Romeo and Juliet	10. Romeo and Juliet before Parting
39. Romeo Bids Farewell (minus mm. 14-23)	
43. Interlude (– 4 measures of introduction)	
47. Juliet Alone (– 4 measures of introduction) (minus middle section; end re-worked)	

Table 3. The Full Score (pub. 1944) and *Ten Pieces from* Romeo and Juliet, op. 75: A Comparison by Number.

Note especially the changes in the numbering of the full score. For the ten movements of op. 75, not many are consequential. Most significantly, the structure of the "Dance of the Knights" was changed: the A B A' of the 1935 version, in which "Juliet Dances with Paris" served as the B-section (similarly, in *Suite No. 1* and *Ten Pieces*), another section entitled "Dance of the Ladies" is added, thereby making the whole structure A B A' C A'' ("Ladies" as the B-section and "Juliet with Paris" as the C-section). The musical material of the "Ladies" is the same as the middle section of the Minuet: while likely serving an important balletic function for Lavrovsky's production, Prokofiev did not include it in the original and omitted in the piano version (and the orchestral suites), since the material had already been presented as part of a different movement. It is not clear from the available information at what point the "Antilles Girls" became the "Girls with Lilies," although the change was likely to have occurred for the 1940 production. Thus, the title of the movement, both in the orchestral suite and in the piano transcription, was probably changed in retrospect. Further, the original 1935 scenario referred to the girls as "Syrian" (half-a-world away from the Antilles Islands!), and they were to serve as exotic gift-bearers: according to

custom, as Paris arrives to collect Juliet for what he anticipates to be their wedding ceremony, he brings gifts. Whether Middle Eastern or Caribbean, the "Girls" were meant to be quaint.

The most substantial differences with the ballet are in No. 10, "Romeo and Juliet before Parting." The corresponding movement in *Suite No. 2* is essentially identical with the piano transcription, once again illustrating the close musical (if not dramatic) relationship between the two. The opening *Lento* corresponds directly to No. 38, "Romeo and Juliet" in the ballet. The following *Andante-Adagio-Poco piu animato* continues to No. 39, "Romeo bids Farewell." The following *Adagio* section is No. 43, "Interlude." The final *Andante* is the only part of *Ten Pieces* that does not directly correspond to a solid block of the ballet: it's a mash up of fragments from No. 47, "Juliet Alone," which focuses on Juliet drinking Friar Laurence's hapless potion. Thus, op. 75 no. 10, while *starting* with Romeo's farewells goes on to complete the dramatic action of both the play and the ballet in its standard tragic version.

5.2 *Ten Pieces* – a Cycle?

The "Antilles Girls" quandary aside, the changes in the titles of movements that occur between the 1935 piano score and the two orchestral suites persist in the piano transcription, thus underscoring a certain proximity and kinship of conception. As a set, however, *Ten Pieces* are entirely different. Whether they can and should be performed as a cycle is not an easy matter to unpack. The succession of tempi and characters allows for a satisfying experience. In fact, the set exhibits elements of arch form. Nos. 1 ("Folk Dance") and 10 ("Romeo and Juliet before Parting") are the longest and balance each other along the stock dramatic street/bedchamber (read outside/inside), general/personal, Harlequin/Pierrot, day/night, extrovert/introvert fault lines. Moving inward, nos. 2 ("Scene") and 9 ("Dance of the Girls with Lilies") are the shortest and least character-driven. Further in, both no. 3 ("Minuet") and 8 ("Mercutio") deal in the grotesque, and, yet again, match each other in length; a nice contrast derives from the pompous arrival of the stuffy guests and the sardonic iconoclast Mercutio; each also happens to be unusual in its use of

simple triple meter. The youthful exuberance of no. 4 ("The Young Juliet") is balanced by the worldly wisdom of no. 7 ("Friar Laurence"); also, the innocent and somewhat awkward girl of no. 4 blossoms into a woman, as the Friar performs the wedding ceremony in no. 7. In nos. 5 ("Masks") and 6 ("Montagues and Capulets"), the youthful pranksters, seeking to make light of the age-old feud by sneaking into the rival family's ball meet their match in the sinister, fateful clangor of the dance of the knights. Clearly, the movements were not originally composed according to these lines, nor were they even chosen from the ballet for these reasons ("the parts best suited for [piano] transcription"), but that they were *ordered* so as to allow a convincing performance of the set as a whole is a distinct possibility.

Another circumstantial argument which supports the performance of the set as a whole is a certain resemblance which it bears to Modest Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1874): ten (same number, if one excludes the *Promenades*) very disparate character pieces wielded together by a loose concept. Apropos, Prokofiev was very fond of Mussorgsky, especially the angularity of his speech-like melodism and a certain "raw" quality of his music, and in his days as pianist played *Pictures* quite a bit. In this, interesting commentary emerges from the catalogue of Prokofiev's performances, as it appears in Tatyana Evseeva's *The Art of S. Prokofiev, the Pianist*: not a single (!) of the many times Prokofiev played *Pictures* in recital did he play it in its complete form.[67] In fact, there is no evidence of him ever performing some of the pieces in public nor did he perform more than six of the movements at once. Present-day orthodoxy certainly no longer allows for such cavalier treatment of what clearly is meant to be performed as a cycle in its entirety! Similarly, with op. 75: while Prokofiev did compile the transcription for himself – as mentioned above, this was the last such opus – and with the promotion of the ballet in mind, he never performed more than three movements in one concert and, of the ten, only programmed "The Young Juliet," "Dance of the Girls with Lilies," and "Dance" (possibly, "Folk Dance?").

[67] Tatiana Evseeva, *Tvorchestvo S. Prokof'eva-Pianista* [*The Art of S. Prokofiev, the Pianist*] (Moscow: Muzyka, 1991), 95-108.

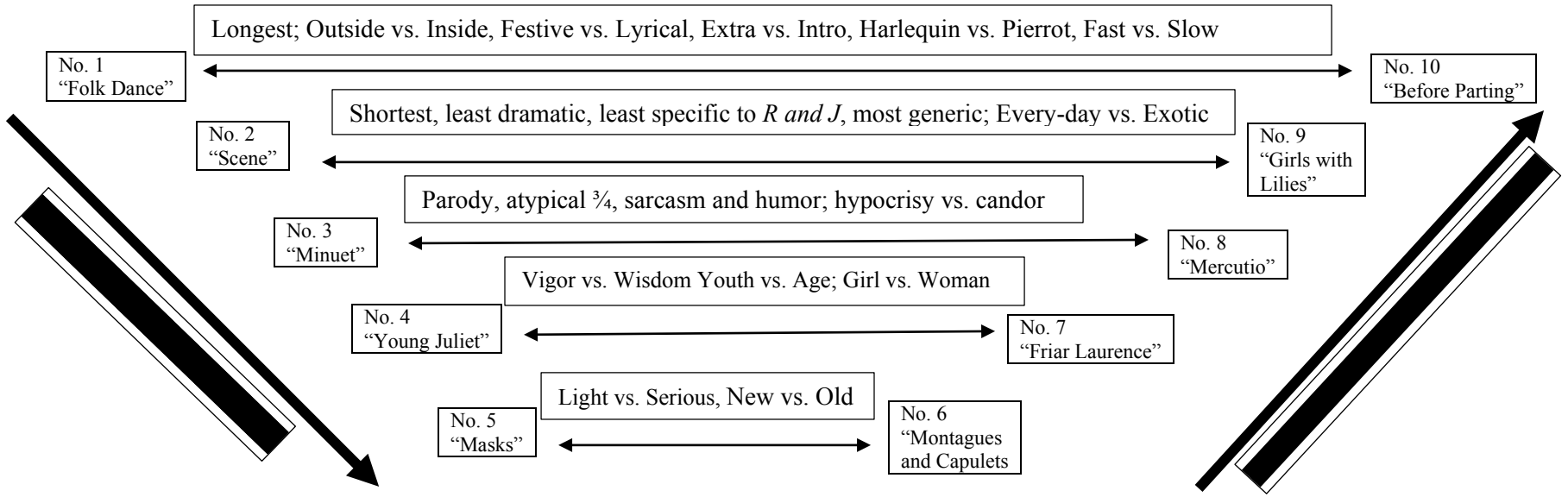


Figure 1. *Ten Pieces from* Romeo and Juliet, op. 75: Balance of Form.

While Evseeva's list is not comprehensive and only professes to list "important" performances, it is reasonable to assume that a complete performance of either *Pictures* or *Ten Pieces* would have to have been included. Clearly, this does seem to grant license to all performers to take as few or as many of the movements from *Ten Pieces* to fashion collections of their own; however, in light of Prokofiev's treatment of the Mussorgsky, the argument is no longer as straightforward as it first appears.

5.3 *Ten Pieces*, the Characters, and the Piano

Much can be gleaned from Prokofiev's original scenario and the descriptions of each of the numbers.[68] Table 4 puts each of the movements in *Ten Pieces* with the corresponding notes.

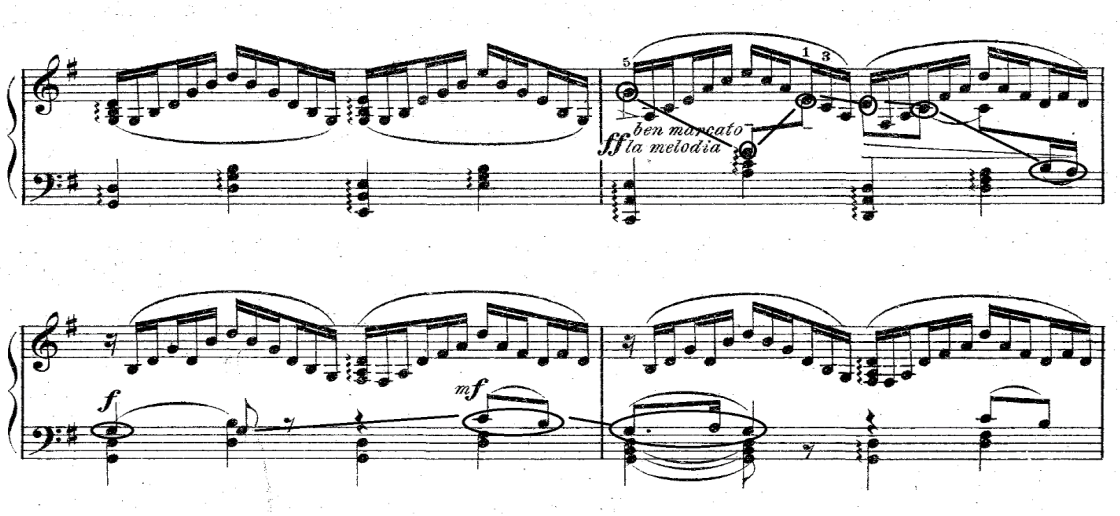
1. Folk Dance	19. Tarantella
2. Scene	3. Entrances, meetings, disputes. Sustained music. [The stragglers return home. The mood is inoffensive. Unexpectedly (on the last chord) someone flings an orange and smashes a window.]
3. Minuet	10. Arrival of the guests (a slow, nondance minuet). [The guests arrive, wearing large mantles and shawls. The dance is mounted as they unwrap and remove their shawls. The guests gradually descend into the interior of the room.]
4. The Young Juliet	9. Juliet's entrance with her nursemaid; she dashes in (her C-major theme, but not immediately). [Just fourteen years old,[69] she girlishly jokes and pranks, unwilling to dress for the ball. The nursemaid nevertheless gets her into a gown. Juliet stands before a mirror and sees a young woman. She briefly muses, and then dashes out.]
5. Masks	11. Entrance of Romeo, Benvolio, and Mercutio [in masks]. A march [Mercutio and Benvolio joke]; Romeo is pensive (8 measures).
6. Montagues and Capulets	12. In the interior a ~~curtain~~ [portière] is opened: A) a ponderous dance [for the nights, perhaps in armor]; B) Juliet dances with Paris [ceremoniously and indifferently]; C) return of the ponderous dance (in lighter guise, ending heavily). Romeo sees Juliet and pursues her [he is smitten].
7. Friar Laurence	26~~. Interlude and arrival at Friar Laurence's (to his music). Romeo enters: "why was I asked here?" Laurence does not immediately answer; Romeo persists. Laurence brings Juliet in (wearing pure white)~~. [Laurence (who walks rather than dances); Romeo enters; Laurence opens the inner doors and admits Juliet. Dressed in pure white, she embodies virginity.]

[68] From *The People's Artist*, Appendix A, 395-402. As in the Morrison, the text in brackets is from revisions to the scenario (not to be confused with the revisions made for the Lavrovsky production of 1940). Strike-throughs indicate text included in the original scenario, but changed or replaced altogether following revisions.
[69] Shakespeare's Juliet is 13!

	27. Romeo and Juliet look each other in the eye; Laurence departs. Rome and Juliet embrace but scamper back to their places upon Laurence's return. They kneel before him; he conducts the wedding ceremony.
8. Mercutio	13. Mercutio's dance, somewhat buffoonish (certainly in 3/4). [He enlivens the gathering.]
9. Dance of the Girls with Lilies	47. [Paris has brought an emerald.] Dance of the four ~~Syrian~~ [Antilles] girls [with an emerald].
10. Romeo and Juliet before Parting	36. Curtain. Predawn haziness. Romeo and Juliet behind the bed curtain. [In order to avoid a misleading impression, the composer attempted to make the music the music clean and bright.] 37. Pas de deux (the nursemaid at the end). [Romeo and Juliet's farewell before their parting. At the end of the number Romeo departs.] 45. Juliet alone with her hourglass: the death theme. [Dance with the poison: "I drink for you, Romeo!"]

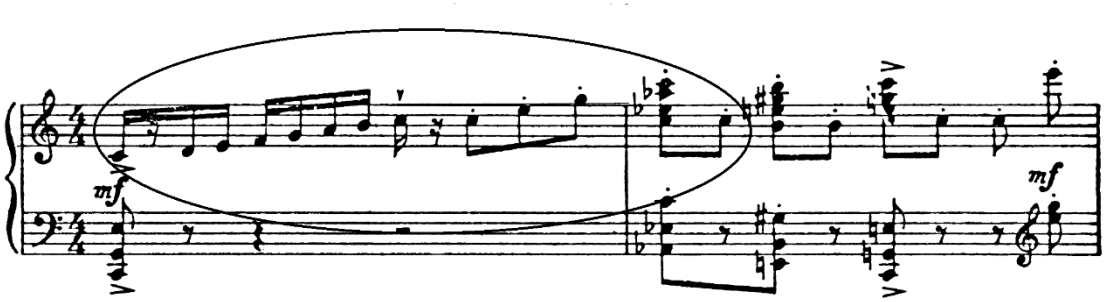
Table 4. *Ten Pieces from* Romeo and Juliet, op. 75, and the Original Scenario.

The scenario, with its detailed description of characters, action, and dramatic *realism*, is yet another important challenge which Prokofiev sought to bring to the classic fairy-tale-ballets of Tchaikovsky. Prokofiev was taken with the aesthetic polemic since his childhood arguments with his mother (she valued Tchaikovsky and Anton Rubinstein over everyone else!). By this point in his career, he felt ready for a show-down. So much so, that his "Juliet" theme is the theme of the "Pas de deux" from *Nutcracker* upside down!



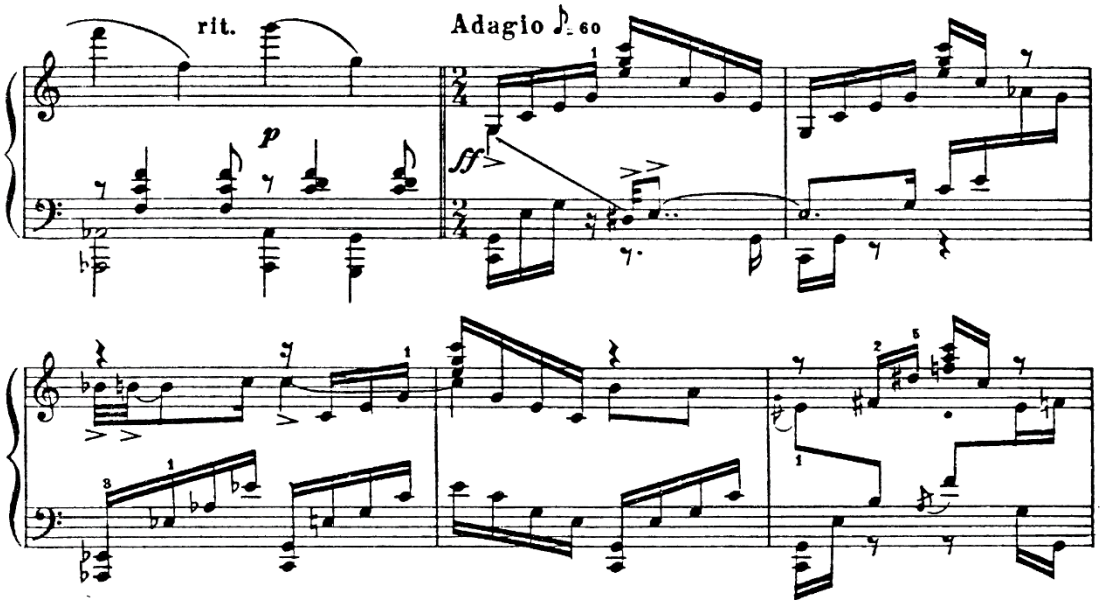
Example 1. Peter Tchaikovsky, "Pas de deux" from *Nutcracker*, mm. 3-6.[70]

[70] Peter Tchaikovsky, *Nutcracker*, Ballet in 2 acts with overture, arr. for piano by Sergei Taneyev (Moscow: P. Jurgenson, n.d.), 144.



Example 2. Prokofiev, "The Young Juliet," mm. 1-2.[71]

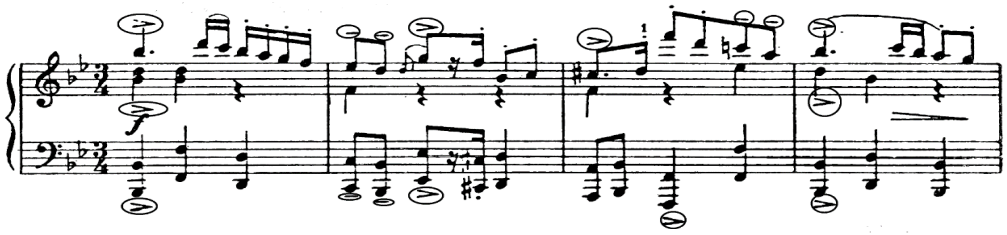
In the Tchaikovsky, the theme is a stepwise decent through one octave of the G major scale, followed by a short formulaic motive reassures the tonic righter after. The rhythm follows the long-short-short-short-short-short-short-long pattern. In the Prokofiev, the theme does the exact opposite (except in C major), while the rhythmic proportions are identical. Moreover, Prokofiev calls on the surrounding arpeggios of Tchaikovsky's "Pas de deux" in what really amounts to a *pas de deux* of his own:



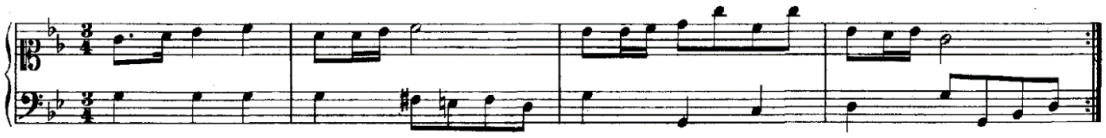
Example 3. Prokofiev, "Romeo and Juliet before Parting," mm. 49-54.[72]

[71] *Ten Pieces*, 19.
[72] Ibid, 46.

Prokofiev followed through on his plans to create a "non-dance" minuet. Of older dance forms, this minuet is much more akin to an 18th-century polonaise, with its processional function, an especially heavy quality and spondaic emphases on every beat such as the one from the *Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach* (1725) in Example 5.

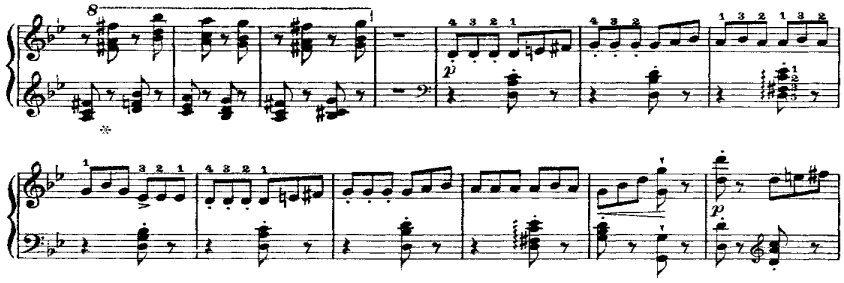


Example 4. Prokofiev, "Minuet," mm. 1-4.[73]



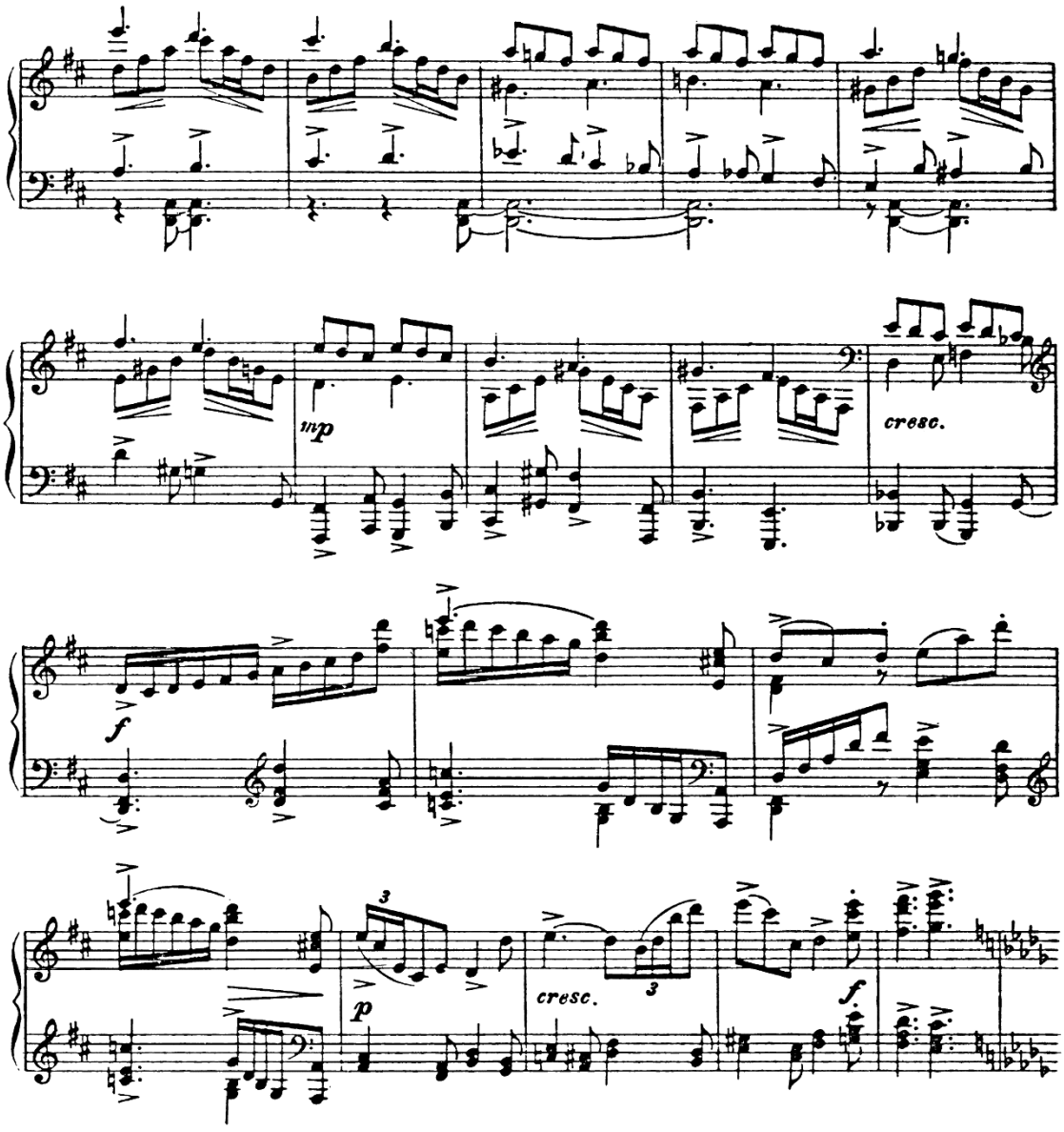
Example 5. Anonymous, *Polonaise in G Minor*, from *Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach* (1725), mm. 1-4.[74]

Also, not particularly appropriate for the genre is Prokofiev's tarantella. The texture of what became "Folk Dance" is closer to a heavier gigue and certainly much too contrapuntal and weighty for the frenetic but light tarantella. Compare the Prokofiev to Liszt's *Tarantella* from *Venezia e Napoli*.



Example 6. Franz Liszt, *Tarantella*, mm. 33-45.[75]

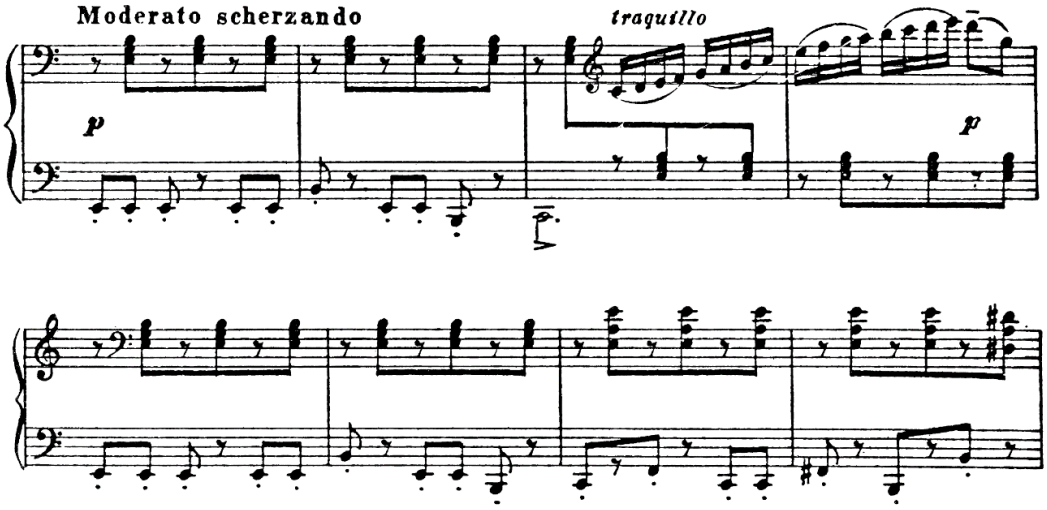
[73] Ibid, 16.
[74] Johann Sebastian Bach, compiler, *Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach* (1725), ed. by Paul Waldersee, *Bach-Gesellschaft* edition, Vol. 43.2 (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1892), 30.
[75] Franz Liszt, *Années de pèlerinage II*, *Supplément*, S.162, ed. Vianna da Motta (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1917), 12.



Example 7. Prokofiev, "Folk Dance," mm. 84-101.[76]

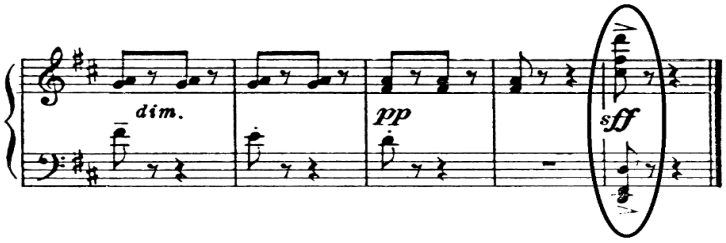
1940 revisions aside, the scenario does not contain some of the essentials Prokofiev went on to add, such as what seems to be a version of the Queen Mab speech as the middle section of "Mercutio."

[76] *Ten Pieces*, 6.



Example 8. Prokofiev, "Mercutio," mm. 45-52.[77]

On the other hand, the scenario provides remarkably exact information on the composer's intentions for the *action* of the ballet, down to specific word painting, such as the flinging of an orange (self-allusion to that other Italian piece of Prokofiev's, *The Love for the Three Oranges*?) at the end of "Scene."

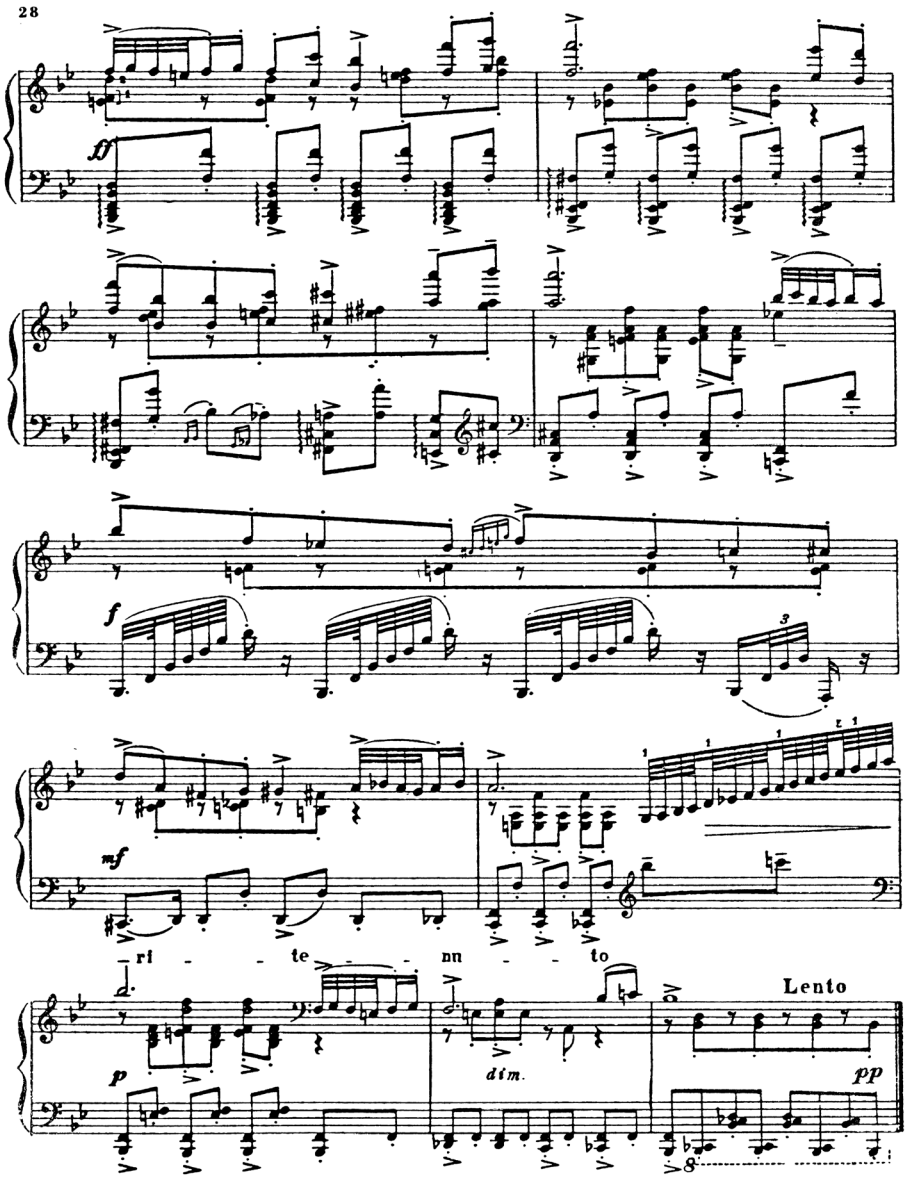


Example 9. Prokofiev, "Scene," conclusion.[78]

A number of passages and some *complete movements* in the *Ten Pieces* bring Prokofiev's claim of being "best suited for transcription" into question. "Folk dance" is rather long and is spun from a handful of motives that sound remarkably colorful when travelling from instrument to instrument in the orchestra. The pianist, however, is left wondering how to produce all those colors while also bringing off the counterpoint and maintaining a good quasi-tarantella pace.

[77] *Ten Pieces*, 32.
[78] Ibid, 14.

Moreover, a multiple of sources speak of Prokofiev's sparse use of the sustain pedal and a complete abstinence from the *sostenuto* pedal,[79] making the pianist's "choice of mallets" the only available resource. Perhaps the most remarkable pyrotechnics are called for in "Masks." To convey the texture here, one must perform true acrobatics, and with lightness and humor to boot.



Example 10. Prokofiev, "Masks," mm. 32-41.[80]

[79] Prof. Dubinsky's recollections are corroborated by Tatiana Evseeva in *The Art of S. Prokofiev, The Pianist*, and similar remarks by a number of pianists, including Heinrich Neuhaus, Emil Gilels, and Sviatoslav Richter.
[80] *Ten Pieces*, 28.

It is significant that both the orchestral suites of 1936 and the piano transcription of 1937 came to be *before* a single dancer had heard the music and certainly before a symbiosis of the balletic art with the music could have been achieved. Thus, in addition to material being removed and added as well as significant changes in orchestration the character, tempi, and, phrasing changed in significant ways as the ballet production came to fruition. The history of Prokofiev's dogged resistance to changes giving way on most counts is also pertinent. Hence, the 1938 recording of *Suite no. 2*, with the composer at the podium, while clearly providing crucial information on Prokofiev's intentions for the music (although marred significantly by inferior performance and recording technology), cannot be treated as a be-all and end-all source. Prokofiev did not record the piano transcriptions nor oversee another pianist's recording of op. 75. Moreover, even the score itself does not necessarily contain all the answers, since it cannot be ascertained how much the composer was involved in the finishing stages. It was standard practice for Prokofiev to hand piano scores off for completion to a subcontractor; as noted above, notes on orchestration were written directly into them and the work of making an actual full score out of it fell to another. Prokofiev considered the work menial, as he did the subsequent arrangement of playable piano reductions. Given his penchant for precision, Prokofiev enlisted such "assistants" with utmost care: the musicologist Pavel (Paul) Lamm, the cellist/music functionary Levon Atovmyan, and even his esteemed friend Nikolai Miaskovsky were involved at various points. Prokofiev's correspondence with Lamm contains plenty of references to the orchestration of *Romeo and Juliet*; there is quite a bit less on the creation of the suites, and hardly a shred on the piano transcriptions. From this we can deduce that he did not oversee the project with zeal. *Ten Pieces*, op. 75, were published in 1938, under the auspices of Atovmyan's *Muzfond*, and the correspondence with Atovmyan hardly mentions this as well. By 1944, when the full score of the ballet was prepared for publication, Atovmyan fully oversaw the process and there is no evidence of Prokofiev even reading proofs. This leads to a very important consideration: while the character marks may have been transferred from the score ballet score to *Ten Pieces* directly, the

task was not to be as straightforward with phrase marks, dynamics, and, especially articulation. Also, importantly, the tempo markings in the *Ten Pieces* coincide completely with those in the scores of the orchestral suites (with exception of "Mercutio," as it was not included in the suites). Whether these were determined purposefully or rather transferred mechanically, is very much in question: after all, the media are completely different and sensible tempi do tend to differ quite a bit. Did Prokofiev authorize this carbon-copying in full consciousness? In light of the fact that he himself ended up performing only three of the movements, this cannot be ascertained. Some tempi did change in the full score published in 1946, although none involving the *Ten Pieces*. However, the seminal 1954 film of the Lavrovsky production at the Bolshoi (granted, after the composer's death, of course) does deviate from the score in tempi, even if one factors in the distortions of imperfect recording mechanisms. Thus, the scenario descriptions remain the most direct and reliable source for deducing the intended characters (hence tempi, phrasing, dynamics, articulation, etc.), as absurd as it is to speak in precise terms when verbal descriptions of music are concerned.

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